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ABSTRACT

The Student Development Center (SDC) serves as a coeducational center for collegiate low achievers in order to transform their ineffective behaviors into those which are conducive to academic success. Before a student is accepted into the program, he is evaluated through standardized tests and an interview with two staff psychologists who determine his emotional, mental, and motivational qualifications. An individualized 40-hour-per-week program is designed for each student. It is based on a learning model involving the following three types of behaviors: (1) incorporative (visual, aural, and kinesthetic); (2) processing (thought, emotion, and motivation); and (3) projective (movement, written, and oral). The program includes reading, writing, and speech laboratories, group and individual counseling, and courses in problem solving, motivation, time study, mathematics, dramatic interpretation, and psychology. Of the 42 students who enrolled in college after attending the SDC during the first one and one-half years of its operation, followup information has been received from 19 students to date. Of these students, 89.5 percent are known to have maintained a grade-point average of C or better. (DH)

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Abstract

The Student-Development Center: A Ten-week Experience in Re-education

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The Student-Development Center of Mount St. Mary's College in Los Angeles is a ten-week coeducational program for collegiate low achievers. The program is based on a learning model involving incorporative (visual, aural, and kinesthetic), processing (thought, emotion, and motivation), and projective (movement, written and oral expression) behaviors.

Included in the intensive forty-hour-per-week program are reading, writing, and speech laboratories, group and individual counseling, and courses in problem solving, motivation, time study, mathematics, dramatic interpretation, and psychology.

76.3% of the graduates of the SDC program have been placed in 30 major colleges and universities. Of those who have received grades to date, 89.5% are known to have an average of C (2.00) or better.

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The Student-Development Center: A Ten-week Experience in Re-education

Barbara E. Biggs, Harry H. Boyle, Gary S. Felton,
Lloyd J. Thomas and Betty R. Wilson

Mount St. Mary's College

The Student-Development Center (SDC) at Mount St. Mary's College in Los Angeles originally was designed in early 1969 as a model for a college-wide learner-oriented developmental program, was formalized as a coeducational center for collegiate low achievers, and subsequently was opened to students in September of that year.

Model and Methodology

The overall purpose of the Student-Development Center was to transform the previously ineffective life styles of collegiate low achievers into behaviors appropriate to academic success. The following pragmatic learning model provided a structure within which such effective behaviors might be implemented:

Incorporative Behaviors

Visual	Aural	Kinesthetic
Reading	Listening	
Speed	Interpersonal communications	Eye-hand coordination
Vocabulary	Lectures	Efficient movement
Retention		Bodily awareness
		Touching behavior

Selective Attention

Main and subordinate ideas

Sensitivity to environment

Processing Behaviors

Thought	Emotion	Motivation
	Experiential	
Critical analysis	Situational anxiety	Need achievement
Creative synthesis	Fear of failure	Goal setting
Problem solving	Fear of success	Time scheduling
	Alternative	
	Appropriate risk taking	
	Appropriate emotional expression	
	Receptivity to feedback	

Projective Behaviors

Written Expression	Movement	Oral Expression
Task		
Note taking	Non-verbal self expression	Correction of major speech errors
Outlining	Appropriate risk-taking behavior	Self expression
Test taking	Behavioral commitment	Presentation of ideas
Formalized writing		

Verbal/Non-verbal Congruence

Process

- Differentiation of task and process
- Self expression
- Presentation of ideas
- Style

Courses were developed by the Center's staff which would:

1) Create an individualized program to develop pre-academic skills.
2) Encourage supportive and meaningful relationships among students and staff.
3) Structure experiences which demand appropriate risk-taking behavior and imaginative articulation of new perspectives.
4) Emphasize the interdependence of bodily, emotional, and intellectual processes.
5) Provide multiple alternatives to unsuccessful individual learning

behaviors.

6) Demand explicit articulation of goals and their translation into behavioral objectives as well as relate these considerations to the efficient use of time.

7) Make clear the differentiation of the student's tasks from his personal, internal processes.

8) Distinguish ritualized behaviors from genuine involvement in task and process.

9) Provide continuous feedback concerning discrepancies between stated goals and observed behaviors.

Admissions Procedure

Anyone over the age of 17 is eligible to apply to the SDC; there is no age ceiling. Each prospective student goes through a six-step evaluation and planning process. First, the applicant meets informally with a staff member to obtain preliminary information about the Center and necessary application forms. He then is given an array of 10 standardized tests, for which he pays an assessment fee of $50. A formal individual interview follows and this contact is decisive for the applicant. The interview, conducted by two staff psychologists, is structured carefully to determine, among other qualities, the extent of the applicant's emotional pathology and the level of personal academic motivation. Mental retardation, extreme psychological disturbance, low level individual motivation to change, and illiteracy are the principal reasons for exclusion from the program. Test results are not used to provide admission criteria, inasmuch as scores frequently change dramatically in the course of the ten-week program. Such scores are helpful

in the individualized program-planning process, once an applicant becomes a full-time student at the Center.

If the applicant is not admitted to the SDC program, the interview is extended for the purpose of reporting test results and exploring alternative actions.

Program

The content of the SDC curriculum continually is evaluated and modified by staff members and by students—new courses are developed and others are re-structured or dropped from the program's format, as needs arise. Currently, an individualized, 40-hour-per-week program is designed for each student from the following content areas:

Communication: The SDC staff believes that the quality of one's encounter with the world depends upon the skill with which he communicates. Therefore, students are encouraged to discover new ways to open themselves to all of their environment and to express freely their own thoughts and experiences. The communications program includes several sub-sections:

Reading laboratory. In the reading laboratory the student works individually, at his own level, and he is encouraged to use self-pacing materials and instruments which increase reading speed, comprehension, and retention. The students also work as a group to complete exercises on the tachistoscope to increase their visual-perception span and vocabulary, and to learn the techniques of speed reading.

Writing laboratory. The major emphasis in the writing laboratory is the differentiation of task and process. As the student is engaged in the task of writing a specific assignment, he is asked to

observe himself in process and to note these observations on another paper. Many students who generally experience great difficulty with writing tasks become expressive when they are asked to explore the feelings that they experience as they encounter this problem. Both forms of writing provide an opportunity for the student to master the basic skills of spelling, punctuation, syntax, and vocabulary. Programmed materials also are made available to help students who have specific problems in these areas.

Additionally, students engage in a variety of writing experiences to master the fundamentals of expository, narrative, descriptive, and creative writing forms, as well as of outlining, note taking, and the finer points of organization and critical thought. The experience culminates in the preparation of a formal research paper of collegiate quality.

Speech laboratory. Any student with speech difficulties—lisp, foreign or regional dialect, stuttering, etc.—may include individual speech therapy in his schedule. He is taught to recognize his speech problem and to engage in corrective exercises. Tape recorders and dictaphones are available for daily individual practice.

Drama course. Under the guidance of a professional director, the student has the opportunity to discover within himself the underlying emotional content in classic literature. He learns new ways to memorize material, practices commitment to an idea, and sees himself perform under pressure through meaningful video-tape and group feedback.

Counseling: Both individual and group counseling are a major part of the SDC experience. Each student participates in small-group counseling sessions for one and one-half hours, four days each week, in addition to one, two-day weekend retreat. Although the format of these sessions is flexible, the focus primarily is on the psychological exploration of

present experience, with an emphasis on immediate giving and receiving of feedback and communicative styles. Individual counseling is available on request.

Problem Solving: In this task-oriented seminar, the student learns problem-solving techniques, critical analytic processes, and decision-making skills. He evaluates his own methods and processes and learns new ways to work in groups, to define problems, to state assumptions, and to propose alternative solutions from which he can make effective decisions. He learns to use these skills on an individual basis through experiencing actual problems and dilemmas which are presented in the sessions and which must be solved in a limited amount of time.

Motivation: Research has demonstrated clearly that people who are motivated highly toward success are indeed more successful than people of comparable ability who are less motivated to succeed. Inasmuch as people can be taught to think and to behave as if they were high-achievement-oriented individuals, and inasmuch as this experience frequently changes the actual motivation and behavior in their daily lives, this seminar has a pivotal role in the SDC program.

Time Study: One of the characteristics of a person who is motivated highly to succeed is the ability to set realistic goals. This implies that the person has skill in assessing his own abilities and in managing his time efficiently. The time study seminar deals with the establishment and implementation of behavioral objectives within a time-oriented framework.

Mathematics: In an informal setting, the student has an opportunity to explore those areas of mathematics which previously he has avoided, and to practice a mathematical approach which involves minimal symbolization.

Psychology: This course is organized as a collegiate-level seminar and

provides a testing ground for newly-developing skills. Students read, take notes, hold discussions, write examinations and, in conjunction with the writing laboratory, prepare a formal term paper. The course content also provides a cognitive structure to help the student understand his own experience as a low achiever and as a person in the process of change.

Student Population

The following summary information provides a composite profile of the average SDC student. These data were obtained from four groups of entering SDC students—22 men and 19 women, all of whom were tested during the first year of the Center's operation. Their average age is 20.2 years.

In four areas of scholastic achievement, the SDC students scored on the average at the lower 26th percentile of all students in reading, the lower 24th percentile in writing, the lower 37th percentile in listening, and the lower 25th percentile in mathematics. The mean level of intelligence was 112, which is in the bright-normal range of intellectual functioning.

In study habits, the SDC students scored on the average at the lower 18th percentile. However, in academic achievement motivation the SDC students scored on the average at the 52nd percentile. This latter finding probably reflects the positive attitudes which led the students to consider enrolling in the program.

The psychological tests indicate that SDC students, particularly the women, generally anxious when they are taking examinations. As a group, they more often perceive events in their life as unrelated to their own behavior and therefore as beyond personal control, rather than perceive events as a consequence of their own actions and thereby

as under personal control.

The composite personality profile indicates that generally the students are in the neurotic range of psychological functioning. They tend to be distrustful, overcritical, blunt, defiant, dependent, and rebellious toward authority. Frequently they see others as unpredictable, and feel misunderstood and alienated. Their social relationships often are shallow. They are poor at planning and concentration and are passive, indecisive, irresponsible, and show diminished energy level as well as minimal expectations. Frequently they are self pitying, self destructive, self conscious, and appear to be non-conforming, bored, disillusioned, and impulsive.

Obviously these generalizations are summary pictures and do not describe any one student. Such a composite sketch merely provides a general overview of psychological variables found, on the average, among a sizeable cluster of students who are identified, by themselves and by others, as academic low achievers. That the overall psychological picture of the entering SDC student is significantly discrepant from normative findings is an important indicator of the extent to which psychological pathology exists in the kind of student who achieves at a low level academically and on his own seeks professional intervention to modify the behavioral pattern he exhibits.

Racially, 72.9% of the first-year students were Caucasian, 21.4% were Black, 2.9% were Chicano, and 2.8% were Oriental.

Post-program College Placement

The following colleges and universities currently are being attended by graduates of the SDC:

California Institute of the Arts (Burbank, California)

California State College (Dominguez Hills, California)

California State College (Fullerton, California)

California State College (Hayward, California)

California State College (Los Angeles, California)

California State Polytechnic College (Pomona, California)

California State Polytechnic College (San Luis Obispo, California)

Compton College (Compton, California)

El Camino College (El Camino, California)

George Fox College (Newberg, Oregon)

Immaculate Heart College (Los Angeles, California)

Imperial Valley College (Imperial Valley, California)

Los Angeles City College (Los Angeles, California)

Los Angeles Harbor College (Wilmington, California)

Los Angeles Valley College (Van Nuys, California)

Loyola University (Westchester, California)

Mount St. Mary's College (Los Angeles, California)

Northrup Institute of Technology (Hawthorne, California)

Orange Coast Junior College (Santa Ana, California)

Pepperdine College (Los Angeles, California)

San Fernando Valley State College (Northridge, California)

Santa Barbara City College (Santa Barbara, California)

Santa Monica City College (Santa Monica, California)

Thunderbird College of International Relations (Tucson, Arizona)

United States International University (San Diego, California)

University of California (San Diego, California)

University of California (Santa Cruz, California)

University of Southern California (Los Angeles, California)

West Los Angeles College (Culver City, California)

Of the 55 students who attended the SDC during the first one and one-half years of its operation, 34 (61.9%) were recommended for and placed in a collegiate program. Three others (5.5%) who received staff recommendations currently are not enrolled in college, after having chosen to work temporarily. Although 18 students (32.6%) were not recommended for college, eight of these students currently are enrolled in collegiate programs.

To date, followup information on grades has been received from 19 students (34.5%), as shown in Table 1, below:

Table 1. Post-program collegiate-level performance of SDC graduates.

	Students Recommended for College	Students Not Recommended for College
Grade Point Average	N	N
A	3	0
B	5	1
C	6	2
D	2	0
F	0	0

To date, 76.3% of all SDC graduates are attending a collegiate level program on a full-time basis. Of these 42 students, 53.9% have not yet received grades. Of those students who have received grades, 89.5% are known to have maintained a grade point average of C (2.00) or better, and 10.5% have not met this criterion.

The followup data indicate that the staff has been successful in developing a major learning program which is highly effective in speaking to the academic and emotional needs of many college-age low achievers.